United Nations A/51/PV.70

General Assembly
Fifty-first Session

Official Records

70th plenary meeting
Tuesday, 3 December 1996, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Razali Ismail ..... (Malaysia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 33

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/51/543, A/51/678)

Draft resolutions (A/51/L.38, L.39, L.40)

The President: I call on the representative of Norway to introduce draft resolution A/51/L.40.

Mr. Biørn Lian (Norway): I have the honour to introduce, together with the Russian Federation and the United States of America, draft resolution A/51/L.40 on the Middle East peace process.

This draft resolution is a follow-up to General Assembly resolutions 48/58, 49/88 and 50/21. The draft resolution welcomes and gives full support to the achievements of the peace process so far and points to the need to proceed with negotiations with a view to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

These are difficult and trying times for the peace process in the Middle East. We all knew it would never be easy. The road to peace in the Middle East is less well-travelled than the road to war. Our late Foreign Minister, Johan Jorgen Holst, often remarked that the road to peace in the Middle East would be dangerous, politically difficult and subject to highway robbers and other spoilers of peace. His words were only too true. Yet the alternatives to peace are too ghastly to contemplate. We owe it to ourselves and to our children not to give in.

Time is not on our side. During the past year we have repeatedly seen how much damage small extremist groups on both sides can inflict on the peace process. The peace-seeking majorities on both sides must therefore come together in a common stand for peace. The implementation of the Interim Agreement is far behind schedule. We acknowledge that the new Israeli Government needed some time to put together a new negotiating team and we appreciate its commitment to respect existing agreements. Now, however, it is time to reinvigorate the negotiating process. The Israeli Government has a particular responsibility in this regard. We urge the Israelis and the Palestinians to do their utmost to settle the outstanding issues being discussed in relation to the Hebron Agreement.

Norway continues to be prepared to assist the parties in whatever way is considered useful. Through our chairmanship of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, we pursue our efforts to improve the economic basis for the new Palestinian Administration. We need the sustained cooperation and contribution of the international community to reach the ambitious aims that have been set in this regard.

Norway has also deployed civilian observers in Hebron as an advance team for a new temporary

96-86963 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

international presence in that city. The objective of this presence is to maximize the opportunities for peace to take hold. In order to face the challenge of building trust and confidence between Israelis and Palestinians, we are also engaged in a people-to-people programme to promote Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in economic, cultural, educational, sports and other fields. This type of programme hopefully, can help to change stereotypical attitudes and calm existing fears as we move down the road to peace.

The debates and resolutions of the General Assembly should reflect the actual situation and the developments in the Middle East. Since the initiation of the peace process, we have witnessed overwhelmingly positive developments which few would have thought possible only a few years ago. At the same time, we know that many important issues remain to be solved. At present, the peace process is going through a difficult period. The draft resolution before us is a serious and, we believe, balanced attempt to reflect both the achievements and the fact that difficulties exist.

In its preambular part, the draft resolution contains an updating of developments and welcomes the declared commitment of the parties to overcome remaining difficulties and proceed with negotiations. The first three operative paragraphs welcome the peace process and express support for the achievements of the process thus far. In the three following paragraphs, the draft resolution urges the parties to fulfil their obligations and to implement the agreements already reached; calls for the immediate acceleration of negotiations on the agreed basis of the peace process; and stresses the need to achieve rapid progress on all tracks of the process. Operative paragraphs 7 and 8 call upon all Member States to extend economic, financial and technical assistance to the parties in the region and to render support for the peace process. Operative paragraph 9 points to the positive contribution that can be made by an active United Nations role in the peace process and in assisting in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles. The last paragraph encourages regional development and cooperation.

At this crucial juncture of the peace process, it is more necessary than ever before for this Assembly to give a clear and unequivocal expression of the support of the whole international community for the cause of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. We therefore recommend this draft resolution for unanimous adoption by the General Assembly.

The President: I now call on the representative of the Russian Federation, also to introduce draft resolution A/51/L.40.

Mr. Gorelik (Russian Federation) (*interpretation from Russian*): The delegation of the Russian Federation, as a sponsor of the peace process in the Middle East, is honoured, together with the delegations of Norway and the United States of America, to introduce the draft resolution contained in document A/51/L.40.

The main thrust of this draft resolution is to consolidate the achievements made in the Middle East process and to urge the parties towards a prompt and good faith implementation of the agreements achieved. Meanwhile, the situation appears to be highly contradictory.

On the one hand, events of great political importance have taken place in the past year in the Middle East, especially on the Palestinian track: the first democratic elections, the election of the Palestinian National Authority, the formation of a self-government structure in the Gaza sector and the West Bank of the Jordan. Thus, a serious step has been taken towards the exercise of the national rights of the Palestinian people to their land, including their right to self-determination.

We believe that, from a historical perspective, a "critical mass" of peace, goodneighbourliness and cooperation is forming in the Middle East. The Madrid peace process, which Russia supports, is bringing the peoples of the area the tangible fruits of practical cooperation.

The real confirmation of this came at the Cairo Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit, which will give further momentum to the actions in the Middle East.

We must all support the ongoing movement towards peace, especially towards the restoration of the self-determination of the Palestinians. In this connection, draft resolution A/51/L.40 urges Member States to extend economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinians during the interim period. Russia also intends to help the economic rehabilitation of this area in every possible way through the measures mentioned in the draft resolution. Also of great importance is the provision in the draft resolution that an active role of the United Nations in the peace process in the Middle East and in assisting in the implementation of the Declaration of Principles can make a positive contribution.

We believe that the United Nations and its specialized agencies — especially the Office of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund — have great experience in implementing humanitarian and other programmes in the occupied territories. Their potential could be very useful in the process of implementing the Declaration of Principles.

Russia advocates the comprehensive and fair solution of all aspects of the conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis without detriment to either side. It was precisely on this formula that the Madrid peace process was constructed in the context of which is Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and the formula of the return of land for peace. It is our deep conviction that this is the international legal basis for the peace process in the Middle East.

However, the situation in the region today is alarming. We are concerned by the stalling of efforts to settle the Middle East problem. The uncertainty of the negotiating tracks has led to increased hostility and lack of trust between the two sides. Confrontation in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Nablus and Gaza are also on the increase.

Such a situation cannot continue. As our Minister declared in the Security Council on 27 September.

> "There must be a resumption of the peace process, not with a *tabula rasa*, but on the basis of compliance with agreements already entered into. Only those agreements — not just the written agreements; I must emphasize, but also those reached in the framework of the Madrid process — can ... put an end to the dangerous escalation of violence." (*S/PV.3698, p. 12*)

In this context, we not only welcome resumed contacts on the Palestinian track, but feel that this is a political and psychological test. If it fails, the comprehensive negotiations aimed at solving the remaining problems cannot succeed.

The instability in the Middle East will not end without progress on the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli negotiating tracks. That is why the draft resolution emphasizes the need for progress on all tracks. This can be achieved by all parties' fulfilling their obligations under agreements and arrangements previously entered into. This requires dialogue, goodwill, the good faith of all parties and the support of the international community.

We are therefore concerned at the continuing hiatus on the Syrian track.

The deadlock on the Lebanese-Israeli track, which has its own specific characteristics and international-legal basis for settlement, will be broken only when there is a general improvement in the atmosphere. As I have stated, fundamental in this regard is Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which provides for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, Israel's withdrawal from that country and the security of northern Israel.

We are convinced that the adoption of this balanced draft resolution will be a timely signal of support for efforts to establish a Middle East whose peoples and Governments can live in conditions of good-neighbourliness, broad international cooperation and crucial economic development. We attach great importance to the multilateral peace process, which is becoming more specific in nature, and believe that the United Nations and the Security Council will continue to play a constructive role in this respect. For our part, we intend to continue to act in our capacity as a sponsor of the Middle East peace process. We hope this draft resolution will be supported broadly by all States in the General Assembly.

The President: I now call on the representative of the United States of America, also to introduce draft resolution A/51/L.40.

Mr. Gnehm (United States): The United States is pleased to co-sponsor this year's General Assembly draft resolution on the Middle East peace process (A/51/L.40). Since 1993, the General Assembly has given its overwhelming approval to this resolution, which demonstrates the strong support of the United Nations and the international community for the peace process begun at Madrid. It is a message of support that underscores the positive role the United Nations has to play in the process and contributes to an atmosphere of reconciliation and cooperation that undergirds the efforts of the parties. That message remains relevant and timely.

This has not been an easy year for the peace process in the Middle East. There have been incidents of terrorism and outbreaks of violence. There have been misunderstandings and, indeed, periods of doubt. Progress has been slow. Extremist factions would like to believe that the momentum towards peace has stalled. We cannot accept that. The past is too filled with suffering; the opportunity for true reconciliation has been too long

in coming and the logic of peace remains too compelling to glide backwards now. Despite the challenges they face, the parties to the Madrid process have clearly stated their commitment to moving forward. The General Assembly should honour and endorse this commitment.

As we speak, Palestinians and Israelis remain hard at work negotiating the next important steps in their political journey together, including the issue of Hebron. I would like to take this opportunity to express our hope that Lebanon, Israel and Syria will also achieve progress in negotiations. In this regard, I should like to reaffirm my Government's commitment to Lebanon's political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Those objectives were stated in Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which my Government supports.

The United States is proud once again to have worked closely with Russia and Norway in sponsoring this draft resolution. Its adoption will send a strong signal of support to the parties for their continued efforts, contribute to the momentum of the peace process and underscore the importance we all attach to building on the achievements and commitments that have been made by the parties to date. We invite the representatives of all States to join us in expressing support for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Peleg (Israel): For the better part of this decade, the peoples of the Middle East have been travelling on the road towards peace and a better future. The road has proven difficult, often pushing our commitment to peace to its breaking point. But the road to peace has also proven to be the only way to escape the cycle of violence and bloodshed that has gripped our region for nearly 50 years.

All of Israel stands united — united in our commitment to peace; united in our hope to achieve a historic reconciliation with our neighbours; united in our desire to create a better future for our children and our children's children. Israel's commitment to peace and to the peace process is unwavering, transcending all partisan lines.

Since the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, Israel — indeed, the entire Middle East — has undergone a sea change. The Conference formula for both bilateral and multilateral negotiations between Israel and its neighbours has produced significant progress towards peace and cooperation. On 13 September 1993, Israel and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, signifying our joint determination to transform decades of conflict into a new era of peace and cooperation. The process which began on that date represents the best, perhaps the only, opportunity the people of our region have for peaceful coexistence.

The subsequent agreements reached by Israel and the Palestinians — the Gaza-Jericho Agreement and the Interim Agreement — are forging a new reality in the Middle East. Another very significant event was the signing of the Treaty of Peace with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in October 1994.

Egypt was the first Arab country to make peace with Israel in 1979. Israel has always recognized the centrality of Egypt in the Arab world and in the Middle East as a whole. We trust that Egypt will use its regional and international standing to help further the peace process and to moderate the radical elements in the Arab world.

Since the establishment of peace with Jordan, our two countries have embarked on a series of joint ventures in such fields as agriculture, textiles and energy conservation. We hope that our relations with Jordan will serve as a model for future relations with all the States of our region.

Israel is also encouraged by its developing relations with North African States, such as Morocco, Tunisia and Mauritania, and with Oman and Qatar in the Persian Gulf region. The importance of those relations in helping us jointly confront the common challenges of our region cannot be underestimated. The existential and environmental problems which we face include the scarcity of resources, such as water, pervasive desertification, poverty and pollution. With the cooperation of all the countries of the region, we can cope with those problems and jointly meet the challenges of tomorrow. This will be to our own benefit and to the benefit of our future generations.

Regional cooperation against terrorism and its supporters received expression for the first time this year at the Summit of Peacemakers at Sharm el-Sheikh. President Clinton of the United States co-hosted the Summit with President Mubarak of Egypt. Leaders from Israel, Russia, Europe and many Arab and Muslim countries were also in attendance.

The Summit had three objectives: to enhance the peace process, to promote regional security and to

combat terror. In the Summit's final statement, the participants re-emphasized

> "their strong condemnation of all acts of terror..., including recent attacks in Israel, considering them alien to the moral and spiritual values shared by all peoples of the region". (*Journal of Palestine Studies XXV, No. 4, p. 137*)

The participants pledged:

> "to exert maximum efforts to identify and determine the source of financing for these groups and to cooperate in cutting them off". (*ibid.*)

We believe that the peace we are creating with our neighbours will translate into full regional cooperation. Two years ago a process of extensive regional economic cooperation began with the convening of the first Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit at Casablanca, under the auspices of His Majesty King Hassan II of Morocco. Last year, a second Summit was held at Amman under the auspices of His Majesty King Hussein of Jordan. Last month, a third summit was held at Cairo under the auspices of President Mubarak.

Two thousand participants came from 61 countries, including most of the countries of the Middle East and many Muslim countries from outside the region. The theme of the Summit, as stated in the Cairo Declaration, was "Building for the future: creating an investor-friendly environment". At the Summit, participants from Governments and the private sector reaffirmed their commitment to continue to work as partners for peace and prosperity in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Summit highlighted the region's economic, commercial and trade potential, as well as the reform programmes being undertaken by many of the States in the region, which will provide a more business-friendly economic climate throughout the region. Government representatives reaffirmed their commitment to establishing a bank for economic cooperation and development in the Middle East and North Africa at Cairo. Next year's economic summit will be held at Doha, Qatar.

Our efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace and greater regional cooperation will fall short without the participation of Syria and Lebanon. Syria, as a leader in the Arab world, with a rich cultural and historical past, has a major role to play in the further development of the region. We believe that our two countries can mutually benefit from the greater level of political and economic cooperation that normalization would bring about. I would like to reiterate here Israel's invitation to Syria, as a party to the Madrid Peace Conference framework, to resume negotiations with Israel without preconditions.

It is the hope of all Israeli citizens that the Yom Kippur war, in which Israel lost thousands of young men on the battle- field, will be our last war with Syria and that the Israel-Syria Disengagement Agreement, which has proven effective for over 20 years, will soon be supplanted by a full treaty of peace between our two countries.

Israel looks forward to the resumption of negotiations with Syria. Syria itself must decide if it wishes to promote peace or to perpetuate conflict. Recent messages emanating from Damascus have left unclear the answer to that question. In recent days, the Syrian Ambassador to Egypt and the Arab League, in a speech at the University of Alexandria, threatened Israel with the use of chemical weapons. The Ambassador's remarks were quoted in the Egyptian newspaper, *Al-Ahram*. That speech marks the first time that an official of Syria admitted to having in its possession a cache of chemical weapons that Syria plans to use against Israel. Those most disturbing comments directly contradict Syrian claims that Syria is committed to the peace process and to resolving the contentious issues between us through direct negotiations.

Make no mistake. Israel yearns for peace, but if attacked, we will defend ourselves as we have in the past.

As for Lebanon, it should be remembered that for years our border with Lebanon was the quietest of all of our frontiers. It used to be said that Lebanon would be the second Arab State to sign a peace treaty with Israel, waiting only for another State to take the first step. Unfortunately, since 1976, South Lebanon has been a base for attacks against Israel. Allow me to reiterate Israel's position: We have no territorial claims on Lebanon. The only issue that exists between us and Lebanon is the preservation of the security of both northern Israel and southern Lebanon. Only when Hezbollah terrorists are disarmed and the Lebanese Government extends its effective control to the international boundary will the hope of peace between our countries become a reality.

It is no secret that Syria enjoys substantial leverage over Lebanon and its policies and that thousands of Syrian troops are deployed in Lebanon. Likewise, it is clear that Hezbollah activities in southern Lebanon against Israel are completely dependent on Iranian financial and military support and on Syrian logistical support and that they would cease in the absence of that support. Syria can make an important contribution to the peace process by ensuring the cessation of Hezbollah's activities and by ending its cooperation with all international terrorist organizations operating from Syrian territory.

Syria and Lebanon need peace as much as Israel and the rest of the Middle East do. Peace will allow Syria and Israel to invest in people instead of weapons; in security instead of war; in economy and development instead of confrontation. There is no way to achieve this other than through direct negotiations at the decision-making level. That is how peace was achieved with Egypt and with Jordan and that is how understanding and agreements were achieved with the PLO.

The draft resolution on the Middle East peace process, which was introduced earlier and is sponsored by Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States, expresses the continuous support of the international community for the positive changes in the Middle East and, we hope, will be given the support of all United Nations Member States.

The United Nations has played an important role in providing economic assistance to the Palestinians through such agencies as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Israel welcomes and encourages this support and will continue to work closely with these organizations in implementing programmes aimed at the improvement of the living conditions of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, as a member of the group of international donor States, we will continue to contribute directly to the Palestinians.

A strong relationship exists between economic prosperity and political stability. Israel believes that the peace process will stand a greater chance of succeeding if the regional economic infrastructure is strengthened. Only in that way can we eliminate the poverty and despair that breed hatred, fanaticism and bloodshed. Peace is at hand. Let us work together to make it a reality.

Mr. Allagany (Saudi Arabia) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The Middle East is going through a period of transition. It is moving from a time of conflict and war into a new era, in which a just and universal peace is possible between the peoples of the region. This new stage will lay an additional burden on all the parties involved who wish to see prosperity and well-being for the peoples of the region. We should not believe that the peace process will continue automatically. The truth is that all the parties involved must give new momentum to the negotiations. We say this because the Middle East has over the past few months been going through a crisis that threatens completely to destroy the peace process, as a result of the hesitation and stalling of the Israeli Government with regard to the implementation of the basic peace agreements in which it does not believe. There is a danger that this will lead to practices that should have ended when the peace process began in Madrid.

The Arab response to the new policies of the Israeli Government was crystallized in the final communiqué of the Arab Summit, held in Cairo in June 1996. In that document, the Arab States reaffirmed their commitment to the continuation of the peace process in accordance with the principles agreed upon at the Madrid conference, and especially the principle of the return of land for peace, in conformity with resolutions of international legality.

We are deeply concerned about the decisions of the Israeli Government on the expansion of Israeli settlements and the establishment of new settlements on the West Bank, in occupied Arab Jerusalem, in the Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan. We believe that the measures taken by the Israeli Government in that regard will only exacerbate tension in the area, encourage the cycle of violence and undermine the credibility of the Israeli Government with regard to the continuation of the peace process. They also threaten to destroy the peace process by completely undermining it.

We are especially concerned about the new guidelines adopted by the Israeli Government and the declarations made by the Prime Minister of Israel concerning the foundations of the peace process, in particular the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of the return of land for peace. The current situation is of concern to us, given the problems associated with the final status of Jerusalem, the settlements, the return of refugees and the re-establishment of Palestinian

sovereignty. Such guidelines and declarations are not in accordance with the agreed principles and link the implementation of the peace process to domestic problems that have recently emerged.

The redeployment of Israeli forces in Hebron has been delayed several times. This has encouraged the Israeli settlers to continue their provocative actions. This has aggravated tensions in the area, which have reached levels unprecedented in the city of Jerusalem. Moreover, there is no security at all in the journey between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. That is damaging to the integrity of Palestine as an indivisible territorial unit, as envisaged in the peace accords. This situation will only delay the exercise of authority and responsibility by the Palestinian Authority and will lead to worsening economic and living conditions in the occupied territories.

The accords between Palestine and Israel provide for the release of Palestinian prisoners as a measure to increase mutual confidence between the parties and as proof of goodwill. The United Nations has asked the Israeli authorities not to detain prisoners within the occupied territories, because this is a violation of the fourth Geneva Convention. The United Nations has asked Israel to respect that Convention, but the Israeli authorities have not complied with that request.

International reports indicate that the Israeli Cabinet decided on 2 August 1996 to lift the restrictions, which had been imposed by the previous Government in 1993, on the construction of settlements in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. They began to streamline approval procedures by placing them under the responsibility of the Minister of Defence. It was also reported that the Israeli Government had pledged $5 million in aid to settlers, and that the present number of settlers on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had increased by 45 per cent.

We believe that this settlement policy and these settlement efforts have created a menacing and serious situation, which is a threat to the Palestinian people and to the peace process itself. Moreover, they are incompatible with the Fourth Geneva Convention and with the provisions of the accords, which provide for the security and territorial integrity of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the transition period before the conclusion of the scheduled negotiations on the situation and the final status of the region.

At the beginning we welcomed the Palestinian-Israeli agreements that had been concluded so far. We thought that they could form a basis for the application of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements according to the agreed timetable. We thought that they would make it possible to strengthen the autonomy of Palestine and strengthen Palestine's political and economic foundations during the transitional period, while awaiting the restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, in particular its rights to self-determination and to the creation of its own independent state within its own territory with, God willing, Jerusalem as the capital.

Jerusalem is an integral part of the Palestinian territory, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967, and in accordance with Security Council resolution 242 (1967) it must be given the same status as other Palestinian territories. The annexation of Jerusalem is not legitimate, neither are the measures taken by the Israeli Government to change the demographic composition and status of Jerusalem. None of this is legitimate. We recall once again Security Council resolution 478 (1980) concerning Jerusalem, in which the Council decides not to recognize the "basic law" on Jerusalem and calls upon Member States that have established diplomatic missions at Jerusalem to withdraw them. We ask Member States to respect and not contravene that resolution, and we note that it must be strictly applied so as to conform to international legitimacy, which is not incompatible with the Declaration of Principles.

Peace in the Middle East must include all aspects of the situation because the region is one indivisible whole. However, absolutely no progress has been made on the Syrian track. According to international reports, there has been a deterioration of the humanitarian situation for the Arabs in the Golan who are suffering from the repression and persecution of the occupying Israeli authorities. For example, the villages of Majdal Shams, Buq'ata, Mas'ada, Ain Kunya and Al-Fajr have been victims of the worst atrocities of unprecedented horror. Buildings have been destroyed, and fundamental freedoms and personal rights have been stifled. The occupying authorities are preventing members of the Arab population in the Golan from returning to their home country, the Syrian Arab Republic, or going to visit their relatives. This is not to mention the exorbitant taxes levied under very unfair provisions. There is a tax on housing and municipality taxes. There are deductions for national security and insurance. There are mandatory loans which absorb half of the income of those working in industry and trade. The Israeli authorities are also imposing taxes on everything an Arab human being in the

occupied Syrian Golan possesses and tightening the screws on the economy of the area, where the residents have no choice but to work for very low pay in road construction. And this is not to mention the Israeli Government's policy regarding settlement expansion and the confiscation of land, and the fact that refugees and deportees are compelled to live in very unjust conditions.

A just, peaceful and comprehensive resolution of the situation in the Middle East cannot be achieved without the complete withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Syrian Golan and without the dismantling of the settlements in accordance with the resolutions on international legitimacy regarding the Golan. As regards the Israel-Lebanese track, Security Council resolution 425 (1978) calls upon Israel to withdraw its forces — without any conditions — forthwith from all Lebanese territory.

No peace in the Middle East will be comprehensive or stable without there being a regional security system based on security arrangements that are fair, treat all the parties involved equally and keep armament levels to a minimum. This region must be free of all weapons of mass destruction: nuclear, chemical, biological and so forth. Our country believes that it is for the permanent members of the Security Council — who are the depositaries of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and who sponsored the resolution on the Middle East submitted to the Review Conference and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons — to take steps so that the Middle East can become a nuclear-weapon-free zone. From this podium we call on Israel to resume the peace process in accordance with the accords, the arrangements agreed upon and the applicable principles. The objective must be a just peace and stability in the Middle East, despite the position of the new Israeli Government, which is not in favour of the peace process. A just peace embodying the aspirations of the people of the region must be sought, because it is intentions that are important, and the Arabs are determined to complete the peace process.

All the parties must respond to these good intentions for peace. We call on the two countries that sponsored the peace process in Madrid — the Russian Federation and the United States — together with the European Union to take effective measures to give new momentum to the peace process and to force Israel to comply with international law and with relevant international resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 252 (1968), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), as well as the principle of land for peace, so that the Middle East region can finally live in security and stability as it did in the past.

Mr. Amorim (Brazil): As a country in which ethnic and religious diversity has only contributed to enrich its culture, Brazil has repeatedly welcomed the major achievements witnessed in the situation in the Middle East in the last few years.

The convening of the Peace Conference in Madrid in October 1991, the signing of the Declaration of Principles in Washington in September 1993, the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area in Cairo, in May 1994, the Agreement on the Preparatory Transfer of Powers and Responsibilities in August 1994, the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip of 28 September 1995, as well as the constitution of the Palestinian Authority — all these augured well for the future of the peace process in the region.

I also wish to stress the importance of the signing of the Agreement between Israel and Jordan on the Common Agenda in Washington in September 1993, the adoption of the Washington Declaration on 25 July 1994, and the signing of the Treaty of Peace on 26 October 1994, when I had the honour to be present myself.

In spite of these relevant developments, the peace process has witnessed some recent setbacks. The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in October last year deeply shocked all those who support peace. The wave of suicide bomb attacks in Israel in February and March 1996 were also regrettable. More recently, the violent clashes in the West Bank and Gaza posed a new threat to the continuation of the dialogue in the region.

It is the earnest wish of the Brazilian Government that the parties involved in the peace process immediately resume the good track of dialogue and compromise, on the basis of agreements already reached. In this context, a fair and prompt solution to the questions related to the West Bank town of Hebron is essential. Furthermore, it is hoped that Syrian-Israeli negotiations will further contribute to the peace settlement. The Brazilian Government also reiterates its concern with regard to the situation in Lebanon and restates its firm commitment to the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Lebanon, within its internationally recognized boundaries, as stated in Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

Recalling the paramount importance of the bilateral talks mediated by some powers with legitimate interests in facilitating a comprehensive solution to the situation in the Middle East, the Brazilian delegation also pays tribute to the indisputable role the United Nations has been playing over the years in this field, not only by means of peacekeeping, but also through economic, social and humanitarian assistance. We commend the work done so far by the United Nations and recall its permanent responsibility with respect to the settlement of the issue. A word of acknowledgement is due to the highly significant role played by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency.

Mr. Mabilangan (Philippines), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The promotion of economic development in the West Bank and Gaza is indispensable to the full implementation of the Declaration of Principles. We strongly favour the strengthening of economic ties between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government as a sine qua non for the creation of a constructive environment in the area.

The participation of the international community in the economic side of the peace process is also essential. As a result of the Madrid Conference, a multilateral fund was established in 1993, under World Bank supervision, with a view to providing $1.2 billion to the Palestinian Authority. However, the donations so far made to the fund have been disappointingly scarce. We sincerely hope that these financial obligations will be met by the countries that have assumed responsibilities to this effect, in order to help the Palestinian Authority to face the serious challenges with which it has been confronted.

Brazil continues to follow very attentively the unfolding of events in the region and remains ready to extend its contribution to the peace efforts. In this spirit, my country hosted the United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Regional Seminar and NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine held from 20 to 23 March 1995 in Rio de Janeiro. Keenly aware of the importance of economic recovery as an integral part of the peace process, the Brazilian Government has actively participated in the Middle East-North Africa economic summits. We are also particularly supportive of technical and scientific cooperation programmes.

The Brazilian Government renews its strong support to the continuation of the negotiations which, we are convinced, will eventually lead to a fair, comprehensive and long-lasting negotiated solution to the situation in the Middle East, in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We are aware of the obstacles all sides involved in the process will have to overcome in order to consolidate peace, but we encourage all those genuinely interested in bringing about peace in that troubled area to persevere in their efforts to settle differences through dialogue and compromise.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): My delegation commends the efforts made by the Secretary-General in preparing comprehensive reports on the overall situation in the Middle East. These reports remind the international community how much work needs to be done to bring about a lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Since the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements in September 1993, followed by the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip in September 1995, the Middle East peace process has advanced with a mixed record. A few positive developments on the Palestinian-Israeli track of the peace process — in particular, redeployment of Israeli troops from major cities in the West Bank and the holding of general elections for the various positions of the Palestinian National Authority — generated some optimism.

Nonetheless, this mood was quickly overtaken by increasing frustration and anger over the retraction by the new Israeli Government on some crucial areas of negotiations. Similarly, no progress has been made on other tracks of the peace process. We are, rather, hearing ominous sounds that reinforce our fear of an eventual relapse into a situation of mistrust, tension and instability in the Middle East.

The politics in the Middle East revolve around the interlinking issues of ensuring self-determination, terminating all occupation, and restoring land rights and sovereignty over territories and resources. The question of Palestine remains at the crux of Middle East politics, and any progress — or lack of it — on this track of the peace process has its corresponding impact on all other tracks. In fact, the resolution of the question of Palestine holds the key to the achievement of a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The recent report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the

report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories have eloquently demonstrated the continued violation of the rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people. The refusal by the Israeli Government to honour and implement the terms of the peace agreements already agreed to sends an ominous signal. The attitude of the Israeli Government, which has replaced the agreed principle of land for peace with a security-for-peace formula on the Palestinian-Israeli track, has dealt a severe blow to the peace process. The unnecessary delay in the removal of Israeli troops from Hebron, under various security pretexts, only contributes further to widening the gap in trust between the Palestinians and the Israeli Government. It also raises serious doubts about the Israeli Government's motives and its commitment to the peace process. Nothing can justify the Israeli demand to divide the city of Hebron between a population of 120,000 Palestinians and 450 Israeli settlers, who are, for all practical purposes, outsiders. The international community has already raised its voice to reject that attitude, and has demanded that Israel withdraw its troops from Hebron without delay in order to facilitate the return of a climate of trust so that further progress may be made in other areas of the peace process.

It is regrettable that for the past 10 months Israel has continued to pursue with vigour a policy of blockade and collective punishment against the people of the occupied territories, with the ostensible purpose of demoralizing the Palestinian people. The restrictions imposed on the movement of people and goods within the Palestinian and Arab occupied territories and other areas, including Israel itself, have had a devastating effect on the economy and morale of the people in occupied Palestinian territory. Even more regrettable is the fact that Israel has refused to allow safe passage between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, infringing on the exercise of responsibility for self-rule by the Palestinian Authority. Interference in the affairs of the Palestinian Authority also violates the spirit of the peace agreements.

Israel's recent decision to resume the confiscation of land with a view to expanding the illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian and other Arab lands has become yet another source of threat to the peace process. The recent high-profile visit to a settlement by the Israeli Prime Minister constitutes a provocation, an affront to the Palestinian people, which is likely to strengthen the forces that intend to derail the peace process. Israel is also taking steps to bring about demographic and geographical changes in Jerusalem, while continuing to refuse to discuss the question of the Holy City of Jerusalem. There is hardly any justification for the Israeli claim that it considers the question of Jerusalem to be non-negotiable. Under such circumstances, the prospect of the Palestinian people's realization of its right to self-determination, leading to the eventual establishment of an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, seems as elusive as ever.

The stalemate also continues with regard to the settlement of the Syrian Golan Heights, which has remained under Israeli occupation since the 1967 war. Not only has Israel pursued delaying tactics in the conduct of serious negotiations with Syria, within the framework of the Arab-Israeli peace process, it has also made repeated attempts to alter the demographic and legal character of this piece of the occupied territories, in contravention of all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions on this aspect of the question.

Bangladesh condemns any such attempt by Israel and joins others in calling upon Israel to desist from changing the demographic composition and legal status of the occupied Syrian Golan, including the establishment of new settlements and the imposition of its laws on the Syrian citizens in the occupied areas. We also call upon Israel to refrain from taking repressive measures against the Syrian population in the Golan area. We are pleased to be a sponsor of a draft resolution on this subject. We hope it will be adopted by consensus.

Lebanon is another victim of Israel aggression and illegal occupation. The people of southern Lebanon endure the hazardous consequences of the Israeli occupation almost every day. Israel continues to violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of an independent nation by occupying a part of its territory in the name of security. Under Israeli occupation, the people of southern Lebanon continue to suffer regularly from harassment, arrest, torture, persecution and incarceration, accompanied by mass deportation, confiscation and the wanton destruction of lives and property. Bangladesh has consistently condemned the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and the resultant violation of human rights there. We reiterate our call for the implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions relating to the complete and unconditional withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories in Lebanon. We believe that the people of Lebanon have the right to exercise their sovereign authority over their internationally recognized territory and that it is the solemn responsibility of every nation to respect that right.

Peace is a process of partnership, and it is an essential prerequisite for security. Through the signing of peace agreements, Israel has accepted the need to search for security and peace in partnership with its neighbours, including the Palestinian people. The withdrawal of Israeli troops from all occupied territories, the release of all Palestinian and Arab prisoners, allowing the Palestinian Authority to exercise control of its territories and resources, the immediate dismantling of settlements in occupied territories and the establishment of a cooperative relationship with its neighbours can create a solid foundation for pursuing a strategy of comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. We emphasize the importance of a more robust role for the United Nations in the peace process and continue to encourage efforts by the various agencies of the United Nations to assist the Palestinian and other Arab peoples under occupation.

We would like to take this opportunity to express Bangladesh's satisfaction at the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding that allows Iraq to export a limited amount of oil for the importation of food items. While Bangladesh steadfastly opposed the aggression against a neighbour that resulted in the imposition of sanctions against Iraq in 1990, we believe that Iraq's continued cooperation with the international community in fulfilling its obligations under various Security Council resolutions will facilitate the eventual withdrawal of United Nations sanctions against it. Bangladesh believes that sanctions must have their relevance and that they should be used in accordance with international laws and norms, in order not to create particular suffering for the vulnerable segments of society. Any unilateral, ill-considered and irrational decision on sanctions may only weaken the support for this important instrument of international punitive action.

Mr. Al-Awadhi (Yemen) (*interpretation from Arabic*): The Republic of Yemen, reaffirms its positive support for the peace process in the Middle East, beginning with the Peace Conference on the Middle East held in Madrid in October 1991, which provided for a just and comprehensive peace on the basis of commitment to and compliance with the provisions of legitimate international resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and subsequent agreements and protocols, and on the basis of the principle of land for peace and guarantees of a full Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories. Accordingly, the Republic of Yemen emphasizes the need for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace as the basis for security, stability and prosperity in the region so as to eliminate the causes of violence and extremism and instil a climate of tolerance, peaceful coexistence and cultural cooperation among the peoples.

However, we wish to express our concern at the resumption of the Israeli settlement policy in the Palestinian territories, especially around the Holy City of Al-Quds, the building of settlements, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the opening of by-pass roads for Israeli settlers, the continued blockade of Palestinian territories and the refusal to redeploy Israeli forces from Hebron. Such Israeli practices are a flagrant violation of the agreements concluded by Israel with the Palestinian Authority and can only exacerbate tensions and take the peace process back to its starting point. They could even wreck the whole process.

Hence, we emphasize the importance of making rapid progress towards a final settlement, which would ensure that the Palestinian people is granted its legitimate rights, especially its right to self-determination and to establish an independent state with Al-Quds as its capital, in accordance with relevant international resolutions and the basic principles of the Madrid Conference. For this, it is important that negotiations are held on all tracks on the basis of these principles and of respect by all parties for their obligations.

In this regard, the Republic of Yemen, while welcoming the agreement on the basic Declaration of Principles signed at Oslo between Israel and the Palestinian authorities, the related agreements and all the positive developments and steps made along the road to peace, wishes to emphasize that it also welcomes the agreement concluded between Jordan and Israel. We hope that it will be a step towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace and a prelude to the full Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. We call upon the United States sponsor and the Russian Federation to urge the new Israeli Government to resume the peace process, which had made considerable progress after the convening of the Madrid Conference and the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, so that the peoples of the region will not begin to lose hope — the hope that was rekindled during the period prior to the installation of the new Israeli Government in May 1996.

All that the international community together can call for as regards the peace process in the Middle East has already been called for in the final statements of the Summit of the Group of Seven Industrialized Countries

and Russia held in Lyon, the Arab Summit Conference in Cairo, the European Union summit in Florence and the African summit in Yaoundé. The importance of these summit conferences is underlined by the fact that they were held simultaneously at the end of June and the beginning of July this year, after the peace process deteriorated in the Middle East when the new Israeli Government came to office. It should be noted that there is a common element among the four statements issued by the summit conferences. They all emphasize the authoritativeness of the peace process and its foundations, especially the relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace. Moreover, they urge the implementation of the agreements concluded in the context of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians and the resumption of negotiations as soon as possible with the Palestinian Authority, Syria and Lebanon.

The emphasis by the summit statements on the basic principles underlying the peace process and the call for its resumption were a message to the parties concerned, especially the new Israeli Government, that it cannot circumvent those principles. The interests of the States concerned are too great to allow any single party to undermine the basis through a special programme that runs counter to the principles of international legitimacy, foremost among which are the inadmissibility of the acquisition of the territories of others by force, and the principle of land for peace. In this regard, my country welcomes the statements of the international summits calling on all parties concerned to honour their obligations immediately and without hesitation, which reassures us and gives us cause for satisfaction as to prospects for progress in the Middle East peace process.

A just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, together with the achievement of security and stability, can only be achieved through equal commitment on the part of all States of the region, and through the establishment of a zone free of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons in the region. We stress the need for Israel to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and for it to submit its nuclear facilities to the international inspection regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as a first step towards establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and ridding the area of the threat of all weapons of mass destruction. This is based on the belief that the security of States can be guaranteed through a peaceful settlement that respects the rights and interests of all parties and that the negotiations should be based on understandings in the scientific, cultural, social and economic fields and the principle of land for peace.

In this context, we express our satisfaction at the signing of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, which was signed by Mr. Abdulkarim Al-Eryany, our Deputy Prime-Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, at this fifty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly. My country, will begin the procedure for the ratification of this Treaty very soon.

The peace process is currently facing risks and challenges that are preventing it from reaching its goals. Israel is dragging its feet and deliberately stalling on the question of resuming negotiations with the Syrian Arab Republic on the basis of agreements arrived at with the previous Israeli Government, foremost among which is the commitment to withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan and Southern Lebanon in accordance with relevant international resolutions and the principle of land for peace. We emphasize the need for Israel to respect the sovereignty and independence of fraternal Lebanon, release Lebanese detainees and prisoners from Israeli concentration camps, and compensate Lebanon for all the damage inflicted upon it as a result of the continuing Israeli acts of aggression against its territory and people.

In conclusion, I would like to express our hope that the international community will make concerted efforts to encourage the resumption of the peace process in the Middle East in order to achieve stability and international peace and security in the region.

Mr. Al-Awdi (Kuwait)(*interpretation from Arabic*): Allow me to speak on the situation in the Middle East, which is of great importance and of vital interest for the world.

Peace and security must be attained in the Middle East. The people in that region have suffered from the scourge of war and the lack of stability and peace. Wars have unfortunately damaged efforts for development and peace and have been replaced by a race to build up military arsenals with a view to inciting new wars. The principle of peace and security must reign in the region but it has become a chimera, having a negative impact on the peoples of the region and the world. The peoples of that region saw a promising sign in the initiation of the peace process in the Middle East at the 1991 Madrid Conference. The dream of lasting peace and security in the region seemed to be within reach, but there has been

a breakdown in that process for well-known reasons, namely the irresponsible practices of the new Israeli Government. It is no longer logic, dialogue and reason in the name of peace and stability that prevail in the region, but rather intransigence, procrastination and violence on the part of the Israeli Government, jeopardizing peace in the region.

Kuwait is pleased to note that the peace process has begun and that bilateral agreements have been signed between the Palestinian authorities and Israel as well as between the Israeli and Jordanian Governments in 1995. We wish to emphasize that progress must now be made on the Lebanese and Syrian fronts in order to ensure that the hopes of the peoples of the region can be realized, particularly on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). We are deeply concerned by the difficulties the peace process has encountered. In Kuwait we are aware of the inherent danger in Israel's persistence in implementing policies that impede peace in the region despite the agreements that have been reached with the Israeli authorities in the peace process. However, the economy of the territory has not changed and the occupying authority, Israel, is continuing its old practices, which are incompatible with international law and local custom, including unjustified detention, blockades, collective punishment and the expansion of existing settlements. A clear manifestation of these policies is the decision of the Israeli Government to expand the settlements to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and elsewhere, flying in the face of international resolutions and the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949.

Kuwait followed Israeli's recent action in opening a tunnel on the west side of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Israeli policy is aimed at the provocation of Islamic feelings, the judaization of the area and the transformation of its Arab and Islamic character. Kuwait condemns these activities and reaffirms the necessity for Israel to cease such practices and safeguard the Arab and Islamic nature of the holy sites. The peace process is indispensable, and Kuwait considers that Israel must withdraw from the Golan Heights to show its good and peaceful intentions.

Kuwait supports the position of fraternal Syria, which is devoted to peace negotiations. Those negotiations came to a halt but the peace process must not come to an end until it achieves its final goal. We support our fraternal friends in Lebanon. Israel must implement all Security Council resolutions and withdraw from Lebanese territory without preconditions. We stand together with the Lebanese people in the hope that the region of peace and security can be ensured in the region. Just and lasting peace in the region implies that the Israeli people must respect the rights and laws of others and abide by the agreements that have been entered into, show good faith and act on the basis of an enlightened policy, without provoking others, in these endeavours to bring peace and security to the region.

We support the efforts of the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United States and call upon them to act quickly to preserve this push towards peace and ensure that the Israeli Government will respect international legality and the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), as well as the principle of land for peace.

In conclusion, let me affirm the unchanging position of the Kuwaiti Government to preserve peace and security in the Middle East. We are convinced that the required patience must be exercised in pursuing peace, for it will certainly have a positive impact on the peace-loving Arab peoples, who sincerely seek peace as a prerequisite for economic development and prosperity in the region.

Mr. Çelem (Turkey): For the last few months, we have been expressing our concern over the turn of events in the Middle East and the lack of progress in the peace process. With a direct interest in the realization of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, our sincere hope during these months has been that, after a time of change and uncertainty, the present impasse would prove to be a temporary one. We have been waiting for a breakthrough that would reinvigorate the peace process. Unfortunately, our hopes have not yet materialized, and our consternation continues to grow.

Turkey believes that unfulfilled obligations, terrorism and economic frustrations remain the three main obstacles hindering the peace process. In order for the process to pick up momentum, the parties must respect their commitments under the existing accords and avoid any action that may adversely affect these accords. If the negotiations on the redeployment of the Israeli forces in El Khalil — Hebron — reach a successful conclusion, this could be the breakthrough we have been waiting for.

Decisions regarding holy sites in particular have proved to be very ill-advised and damaging. In an area

where all three monotheistic religions should exist together in harmony, such divisive and insensitive actions must be avoided at all costs. In the same context, I cannot fail to mention the issue of settlements. The delicate balances created within the framework of the peace process should be preserved and respected.

If these crucial considerations are neglected, the peace effort in the Middle East may suffer serious setbacks. We cannot afford to see the already fragile peace process shattered. We believe that the legacy of all those who have paid for the cause of peace with their lives should help to nurture it. This undoubtedly requires the parties to exercise the utmost restraint and tolerance.

On the other hand, we believe that terrorism remains one of the fundamental threats to peace in the Middle East. Once again, we underline the urgent need for countries who lend their support to terrorism to end it immediately. We urge them to refrain from using this scourge of our times as a means of advancing their own foreign policy interests. We expect all countries to do their share in this regard at the bilateral, regional and international level. Recognizing the fact that the enemies of peace in our region do not hesitate to engage in violence in order to hamper reconciliation and stability, Turkey, for its part, stands ready to participate in enhanced cooperation to combat terrorism.

Another issue of concern for us is the economic and social situation in the region. The momentum achieved so far in the Middle East peace process needs to be quickly translated into better living conditions for the Palestinian people both within and outside the occupied territories. Once some level of prosperity and economic stability have been achieved, a spirit of cooperation can permanently replace the existing frustrations, which nurture destructive tendencies and intolerance. Given the current situation, the tangible support of the international community in the form of economic, financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian people is of paramount significance. At this stage, I should like to commend the signing of the Articles of Agreement of the Bank for Economic Cooperation and Development in the Middle East and North Africa. We are of the opinion that this bank will constitute one of the major cornerstones of stable and sustained development in our region.

I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate Turkey's commitment to help the peace process in every way possible and to contribute to the efforts aimed at achieving a viable reconciliation in the region. In this respect, we will continue our active participation in all five working groups in the multilateral tracks of the peace process.

As a country of the region, Turkey has always supported the just cause of the Palestinian people, and we are ready to contribute to all initiatives for a settlement based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

I would also like to reiterate my Government's stand on the situation in Lebanon. We attach great importance to the maintenance of the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of that country. We stress the significance of the full and strict implementation of the Taif Accords on National Reconciliation by all parties concerned, and we once again equally stress the need for implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

A just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can only be based upon the rights of all States in the region, including Israel, to exist within secure and internationally recognized borders.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate my Government's appeal to all parties concerned to make every effort to move the peace process forward in the right direction and to achieve the shining goal of true and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Al-Mualla (United Arab Emirates) (*interpretation from Arabic*): Fifty years have passed since the peace process began, but a just and comprehensive settlement has not taken place. We deplore the fact that the present Israeli Government, at a time when the Arab parties have reacted favourably to the peace process as a strategic choice for settling this problem, has rejected its commitments and has gone back on its obligations to which it agreed under the Madrid peace agreement, the relevant international resolutions and the principle of land for peace.

Regarding the Palestinian track, the Israeli Government, in addition to its violations, did not honour its obligations concerning the withdrawal from Hebron, the release of detainees and prisoners, and the need for a final solution. Israel has continued to confiscate lands and to establish settlements. It is desecrating the holy places of Islam and trying illegitimately to change the demographic composition and geographical status of Jerusalem before beginning negotiations on that city's final status.

Concerning the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, the Israeli Government is pursuing its stalling manoeuvres and delaying tactics, and continuing not to honour its commitments regarding the unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Golan and southern Lebanon. Similarly, Israel is stepping up its violence and military hegemony. This is a major impediment to the continuation of the peace negotiations. Israel has really lost its credibility. There are doubts now as to its statements and its intentions to continue the peace process.

My country believes that the settlements policy and judaization, which continue in the occupied Palestinian territories, the Golan and the West Bank, are a fait accompli as a result of repression and arbitrary acts, air attacks and recourse to control of southern Lebanon, Bekaa, and so on. All these practices are null and void, unlawful and a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention on human rights.

The continuation of these Israeli practices is incompatible with the peace process and the positive changes that have taken place on the international scene, and threatens to plunge the region into a new cycle of violence and deterioration of the tense situation, with unpredictable consequences for the entire world.

The objectives of strategic security, stability, cooperation and normalization in the region, to which Israel and the other countries of the region aspire, cannot be achieved if Israel does not respect its obligations concerning the imperatives of the peace settlement. This is an integral part of the orientation towards justice, peace, security and prosperity for all on an equal footing.

By adopting a flexible policy based on wisdom and aimed at regaining total sovereignty and achieving peace and stability for all Arab peoples, the Arab parties to the negotiations have on all occasions demonstrated how serious they are in their political will to achieve a just peace. But the present Israeli Government has misinterpreted that Arab position, and has broken away from the peace process. Recent Israeli practices, and statements made by the Prime Minister of Israel, illustrate Israel's defiance. The most recent of these statements was made this week, when he said he would continue the expansion of existing settlements and establishment of new ones, and that he would keep the West Bank forever.

Israeli practices could well plunge the region into a cycle of violence. Our country believes that we must find a just and comprehensive solution to the problem of the Middle East. We reaffirm our appeal. We believe that the Israeli party must give up anything and everything which prevents the continuation of the peace process in the region. This must be done in the following way.

First, there must be unconditional respect for all the legal commitments with respect to the withdrawal from Arab lands occupied since 1967. This is in accordance with internationally binding decisions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Israel must accept the principle of land for peace.

Secondly, the Israelis must immediately cease any and all activities of establishing settlements. They must dismantle everything which was constructed in violation of legal commitments, which would change the demographic composition of the area or which would damage Arab lands or Islamic holy places.

Thirdly, they must immediately withdraw from Hebron and cease all practices against the Palestinian people that are in violation of the arrangements agreed upon under the peace process. This must be done because the Palestinian people must be able to manage their own affairs and exercise their right to self-determination and to establish an independent State on its own territory and with its own capital.

Fourthly, serious negotiations must begin on a final settlement of the Palestinian question, the final status of the city of Jerusalem, the demarcation of boundaries and so on.

Fifthly, they must continue serious and unconditional negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks to ensure Israel's withdrawal from all Golan and southern Lebanese lands and the right of each and every State to security and national sovereignty over its respective territory.

In conclusion, we are in favour of the international policy of strengthening the role of the United Nations in the peace process at the present time, based on its political and historical responsibilities with respect to this matter, in order to build confidence and to insure support for a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East question, based on fairness and international legality.

Mr. Wisnumurti (Indonesia): In recent years, the international community has witnessed with great hope the seeds of peace being sown in the Middle East. Regrettably, however, it has become increasingly

apparent that some forces appear intent on not allowing these seeds to take root in the ancient soil of the Middle East.

We extensively debated for two days the question of Palestine, which remains the core issue of the situation in the Middle East. It has been our hope that progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track of negotiations — exemplified most recently by the redeployment of the Israeli army from major cities in the West Bank, the transfer of powers and responsibilities to the Palestinian Authority and the holding of Palestinian elections — would have positive spill-over effects on the other tracks of the negotiations.

That hope has not been without foundation. The progress in the Israeli-Palestinian talks has, after all, been mirrored in the transformation of the relations between Israel and Jordan, to the mutual benefit of their peoples. Yet progress on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks remained stubbornly slow. If progress o the Israeli-Palestinian track has proven not to be a panacea for the Israeli-Syrian and the Israeli-Lebanese paths of negotiations, it is not difficult to anticipate the significance of the recent aggression for Israeli-Palestinian relations.

During the debate on the question of Palestine, we heard speaker after speaker list a litany of commitments broken, of intransigence, procrastination and circumvention by the Government of Israel with respect to the implementation of the agreements already concluded, which have virtually extinguished the hopes to which the peace process gave rise.

The same manifest lack of commitment to the peace process on the part of the Government of Israel has unfortunately also been evident on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks of the negotiations. Indonesia remains convinced that peace will continue to elude the Middle East unless corresponding progress is achieved on these dimensions of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is therefore with a deep sense of regret that Indonesia notes the setbacks over the past year in the already scant progress on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks of negotiations.

In April of this year, Israel once again demonstrated its disregard of Security Council resolutions by launching massive land, sea and aerial attacks against Lebanon — a founding Member of the United Nations. The Israeli shelling of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) position in Qana, which resulted in more than 100 Lebanese refugees losing their lives and in casualties among UNIFIL personnel, is a tragic reminder of Israel's continuing pursuit of the logic of war. The violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon is totally unacceptable and we unreservedly support the demand for the complete and immediate withdrawal of all Israeli forces from southern Lebanon.

With regard to the Israeli-Syrian track of negotiations, we note with deep concern recent Israeli attempts to reinterpret or even discard the principles underlying those negotiations. Indonesia would like to reaffirm that a comprehensive and just settlement in the Middle East necessarily entails the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), the principle of land for peace and the return of all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories, including the Syrian Golan, Southern Lebanon and the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. Otherwise, a comprehensive peace will remain elusive. The events of the past year are a potent reminder that much remains to be done before that goal is achieved.

Moreover, for peace to flourish in the Middle East, economic and social development are vital. The array of legal and political frameworks recently laid down in the various agreements already reached must be translated into a real improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinian people. Without it, the peace process remains fragile. Unfortunately, what we have witnessed instead is the closure of areas under Palestinian jurisdiction, including the borders of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip with Jordan and Egypt, and the demolition of Palestinian homes and properties. Those policies are alien to the objectives of economic and social development in the Middle East. Therefore, it is clearly incumbent upon the international community to step up its efforts to mitigate the suffering of the Palestinian people. In addition, it must minimize political uncertainty, which is damaging to private-sector growth, by ensuring respect of the letter and spirit of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and of subsequent agreements.

Indonesia firmly believes that the Middle East peace process must move forward and be rendered irreversible. The important accomplishments of the past few years should not be allowed to dissipate. Instead, the climate of distrust should be replaced by renewed faith in peace. To that end, it is essential that the international community put the peace process back on the right track to protest against a party that seems bent on aborting it.

The seeds of peace painstakingly sown over the past few years must be allowed to take root and flourish.

Ms. Lee (Singapore): Like many other Member countries of the United Nations, Singapore was gravely concerned at the violent confrontations that occurred in September this year in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, after Israel opened a second entrance to the Western Wall tunnel, near the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem's Old City.

Such clashes have put the Middle East peace process in jeopardy. Peace cannot be delayed any longer. Both sides must work together in a spirit of genuine compromise, based on a broad vision of what is best for their peoples and for the region. To act only on narrow, short-term political considerations would trigger another bloody cycle of violence. That would have great costs for both sides. The consequences would also leave their mark on the whole world.

The Assembly has just heard statements in the debate on agenda item 35, entitled "Question of Palestine". It is clear from that debate that the rights of the people of both Israel and Palestine are important. The Israel-Palestine conflict is at the core of the peace process. It is also at a very crucial stage. Much effort and cooperation is therefore required to avoid any further provocative actions that could lead to more violence.

Singapore continues to place the highest importance on the peace process. Unfortunately, its current status is not encouraging. Israel and Palestine, for the good of their peoples, must not forget their commitment to the peace process. Now more than ever, the people of Israel and Palestine need something greater than mere assurances, words or handshakes to give them hope for an end to hostilities in the region and for new momentum in the peace process.

Singapore therefore welcomed the news of the recent discussions between Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Singapore hopes that those discussions will lead to the renewal and advancement of the peace negotiations. The fact that the peace process has come so far is in itself a remarkable achievement. Singapore expresses its continued support for the peace process and for prosperity and stability in the Middle East.

Mr. Mohammad (Brunei Darussalam): In the past few years the international community has been led to believe that the peace process will result in a just and lasting solution to the problems in the Middle East. The basis for peace laid out in the Madrid and Oslo peace accords made us optimistic that a comprehensive settlement of the problems in the Middle East could eventually be achieved. All the parties concerned have agreed to move forward along the path of peace. This was a welcome and hopeful sign of improved relations between the Arabs and the Israelis.

However, recent events have deeply frustrated those hopes. Sadly, we have been made aware that the road to peace is indeed still strewn with obstacles. The current Israeli leadership has so far not lived up to its commitments to the peace agreement signed with the Palestinians by their predecessors. Instead of expediting the withdrawal of its troops from Hebron, the Israeli leadership is trying to change the accords that have been agreed previously by both parties. Contrary to the spirit of the peace accords on Palestinian self-rule, the current leadership has also returned to the policy of increasing the Jewish settlements and demolishing more Palestinian homes in the occupied territories. Those acts constitute a serious violation of the peace agreement. We believe that in order for the peace process to move forward, the parties concerned must abide by the peace agreement already reached.

Israel's intransigent position with regard to the implementation of the peace agreements has meant that the Middle East peace process is now moving at a faltering pace. This has caused concern in the international community as to whether the parties involved will even reach the next stage of the peace process. We share these concerns and would like to encourage the parties involved to honour their commitments to a comprehensive peace settlement in the region. We would therefore like to see a resumption of Syrian-Israeli negotiations and wish to reaffirm our support for efforts to seek a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Golan Heights. As for the settlement of the Lebanon issues, the Israelis have not moved out of southern Lebanon. Consequently, Brunei Darussalam urges all concerned, and interested parties, to reach an agreement leading to a full Israeli withdrawal from the buffer zone that it occupies.

Nevertheless, and in spite of negative signs, we believe that there is still hope for a comprehensive peace settlement in the region. We would, however, like to see the momentum for peace negotiations be sustained. In expressing our support for the peace process, we again encourage all parties to move in a committed, reasonable and positive manner and to honour their full obligations

on the basis of the peace accords in order to reach a just and comprehensive settlement.

It has always been our desire to see such a comprehensive settlement. In this respect, we wish to reaffirm our support for the peace process and our hope that progress will be made urgently towards achieving the goals defined in the various accords that led to the setting up of the process. We once again urge all parties to adhere fully the provisions agreed upon in Madrid and Oslo.

Mr. Wilmot (Ghana): For some months now, the Middle East peace process has appeared to be in a state of suspended animation, opening the way for widespread uneasiness and a feeling that a region that a year ago seemed headed for a lasting peace might be on a track back towards war.

When, at its previous session, the General Assembly reviewed the situation in the Middle East, it noted with satisfaction the many positive developments that had occurred in the peace process. It noted in particular the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the representative of the Palestinian people, in Washington in 1993 following the peace conference in Madrid in 1991 and its sequel in Oslo. It also noted the subsequent successive agreements between the two parties, culminating in the signing by them of the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip on 28 September 1995. The Assembly further noted with satisfaction the various accords between Israel and Jordan, which were crowned by the Treaty of Peace signed by these two countries on 26 October 1994.

All these developments were viewed as important steps towards achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which call for Israel's withdrawal from territories that it occupied during the 1967 war, and which also emphasize respect for the sovereignty of all States in that region and their right to live in peace within secure borders. The Assembly urged all parties to implement the agreements reached.

It was thus a matter of gratification to Ghana that, following these agreements, Israel withdrew its troops from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area and began their redeployment in the rest of the West Bank. We were equally gratified when the Palestinian Authority was inaugurated in those areas and was able to conduct successfully the first Palestinian general elections in January this year, thus consolidating the assumption of administrative control by Palestinians over their own affairs. We also welcomed the adoption by the Palestine National Council, at its twenty-first session, of the resolution concerning the amendment of the National Charter. We saw all these as important steps and an additional impetus in the impending negotiations on the issues deferred to the final stage. Indeed these negotiations were formally launched in May 1996, raising hopes that concrete results would soon be achieved.

On the economic front, Ghana was pleased by the realization of the importance of the economic underpinnings of peace by the parties in the Middle East, encouraged in this regard by the results of the Conference to Support Middle East Peace convened in Washington in October 1993, including the establishment of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, and the subsequent work of the World Bank Consultative Group. We welcomed the decision by the Gulf Cooperation Council to lift its secondary and tertiary boycott against Israel, and the series of economic conferences convened by the countries of the region to exploit together their economic, commercial and trade potential. The latest of such conferences was the third Middle East/North African Economic Conference, held in Cairo in November 1996, which was aimed at facilitating private-sector investment and enhancing regional cooperation. We were happy to note that in all these endeavours Israel participated on an equal footing with its neighbours, a development that would have been unthinkable a few years ago.

It is against that background that my delegation expresses deep concern and anxiety over the recent outbreak of violence in the region, which has serious implications for the future of the peace process. The restrictions that the Israeli Government imposed on Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza in reaction to the acts of violence have not only fuelled disillusionment with the peace process, but have also caused socio-economic hardship and insecurity that can only serve as a catalyst for extremists to incite negative sentiments against the process. The situation has unfortunately been aggravated further by the tragic events of September 1996 in Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The upshot of all this is the creation of an atmosphere of uncertainty about the future of the peace process.

Happily, both the Israeli Government and the PLO have recently reaffirmed their determination to carry on with the peace negotiations despite the numerous

setbacks. We appreciate this and encourage the parties to continue with the peace process. The alternative is a return to instability, sustained violence, regional tensions and uncertain economic prospects. Even a no-war, no-peace situation would not augur well for the region, as it would perpetuate tension and deprive the countries of the region of an opportunity jointly to exploit their enormous economic, commercial and trade potential for their mutual benefit.

We emphasize the need for all concerned parties to adhere to the provisions of the agreements already concluded and to take measures to implement these agreements in good faith, without delay and within the agreed time-frame, in accordance with the Declaration of Principles signed in Washington and all other agreements, until a permanent settlement is achieved on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). In particular, we call on the parties to resume the permanent status negotiations that were formally launched on 5 May 1996.

Ghana reaffirms its conviction that the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East will contribute significantly to the strengthening of international peace and security. But for this to occur, progress must be made on all tracks of the negotiations. In this regard, we applaud the progress made on the Israeli-Jordanian track, which has led to the normalization of relations between the two countries. We call on Israel and Syria to intensify their efforts to reach a common ground for speedy negotiations on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanon tracks. At this juncture, we wish to register our profound appreciation for the efforts being exerted by all other parties, particularly the sponsors of the peace process, during the bilateral and multilateral talks. We encourage them to persevere in their efforts to ensure the success of the peace process.

The role of the United Nations in the Middle East peace process remains important and must be strengthened and expanded. The United Nations should continue to provide the needed encouragement to the process, extending full support to the agreements concluded and to their timely implementation, and responding to the economic, social and other needs of the populations in the West Bank and Gaza. In this connection, we note with appreciation the valuable contribution of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories in coordinating the delivery of assistance to the Palestinians. We hope that the recent relocation from Vienna to Gaza City of the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) will enhance the quality and volume of assistance to the Palestinians. In this connection, we urge that UNRWA be given adequate resources to fulfil its role in the region.

Lastly, we call on the donor community, international organizations and investment institutions to provide the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction with adequate economic, financial and technical assistance in order to enable it to discharge its responsibilities towards the people of Palestine.

Mr. Campbell (Ireland): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The following associated countries have aligned themselves with this statement: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Iceland also aligns itself with this statement.

The peace process in the Middle East has been seriously hampered in the past year by a number of disturbing events and incidents. In February and March we witnessed the appalling terrorist attacks that took place in Ashkelon, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. These incidents were followed, in April, by the violent confrontation between Hezbollah and Israeli forces in Lebanon. The European Union deeply deplored the suffering inflicted on the civilian populations at that time and the terrible tragedy that occurred at Qana.

More recently, violence and rioting erupted in East Jerusalem and throughout the occupied territories following the opening by the Israeli authorities of the tunnel in the vicinity of the Temple Mount. There is no doubt that the peoples of the region are now profoundly frustrated by the deplorable increase in the level of violence, at the lack of progress in the peace process, and at the failure to implement in full agreements that are already in place.

On the other hand, we must also draw attention to a number of events that have evidenced a continuing commitment to the peace process and have served to strengthen it. The Palestinian elections in January bestowed a democratic legitimacy on the Palestinian Authority and confirmed the commitment of the Palestinian people and of their democratically elected leaders to continuing with the process. Other positive developments have included the Palestine National Council's undertaking to amend the Palestinian Charter

so as to recognize the right of the State of Israel to exist, and the resumption — after the violence that followed the tunnel incident — of direct talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The European Union itself remains deeply committed to the peace process and reiterates that peace in the Middle East is a fundamental interest of the Union. With a view to promoting and assisting the process, the European Union has appointed Ambassador Moratinos of Spain as its special envoy to the peace process. We see his mission as complementing efforts already undertaken by the United States and others, and we are pleased with the positive response that his appointment has received in the region. We would point also to the frequent visits by representatives of the European Union to the Middle East as a further indication of our interest in securing a peaceful settlement. Most recently, from 9 to 11 November, the Troika of Foreign Ministers from Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands, together with the Vice-President of the European Commission, visited the region, meeting with a number of regional leaders in Damascus, Amman, Gaza and Cairo.

The European Union looks forward to the implementation of the already existing Palestinian-Israeli agreements, including the redeployment of Israeli security forces in and from Hebron and the release of Palestinian prisoners. The Union considers it important that other tracks of the peace process be simultaneously advanced and encouraged to bear fruit. We support the opening of negotiations between Israel and Lebanon while fully respecting the right of all States in the region to sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity. We have called repeatedly for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Lebanon and for cooperation with the United Nations forces serving there. It is time, we believe, that Lebanon should also enjoy the benefits of the peace process. The European Union likewise urges an early resumption of negotiations between Israel and Syria. We confirm also our support for the multilateral track, which we consider to be of importance in complementing and promoting the bilateral tracks. The European Union will continue to take an active part in the Regional Economic Development Working Group and in other groups in the multilateral track context.

The European Union considers economic and social progress to be an essential component of the peace process. For some years now, we have been the principal donor of aid to the West Bank and Gaza. In 1993 we announced, in respect of the latter, a five-year programme of assistance, which we are continuing to work to implement. The total sum of the European Community's budget contribution, together with member States' bilateral contributions, accounted for approximately 45 per cent of total donor contributions in 1995. At the ministerial Conference on Economic Assistance to the Palestinians in Paris last January, the European Union pledged a contribution of $120 million for 1996. In addition, the Union was one of the sponsors of the Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference, held in Cairo in November.

The European Union is convinced that the peace process is the only way forward in the Middle East and that there can be no alternative to it. It provides a unique and historic opportunity to achieve the type of peace settlement which the people of the Middle East so clearly desire and deserve. We believe that such a peace is indeed achievable. We urge all parties, accordingly, to work together in a positive spirit and participate in negotiations based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). The European Union will continue to do all in its power to encourage the parties to engage in dialogue and will intensify its efforts to achieve the comprehensive, just and lasting settlement to which all aspire.

Mr. Kamal (Pakistan): Over the last 50 years, the international community and the United Nations have made efforts to address the situation in the Middle East. The United Nations addressed the central issue of Palestine by recognizing the right to self-determination of the people of Palestine. A number of Security Council resolutions, including 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978), provided the basic framework for resolving the problems in the region. Despite these efforts, the situation in the region remained precarious.

Five years ago, perhaps for the first time in modern history, the international community genuinely believed that peace would prevail in the Middle East; that a region which had suffered for so long from war and conflict would have a secure and stable future; that the people of Palestine would be allowed to exercise their right to self-determination, as recognized by the United Nations; that the question of Jerusalem would be resolved and the stateless Palestinians return home in safety and honour; that Israel would withdraw its troops from the occupied territories of Lebanon and Syria.

In October 1991, the Madrid Peace Conference paved the way for further negotiations between Arabs and Israelis. The conclusion of the two accords between

Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the signing of the Israeli-Jordanian Treaty of Peace and the two regional Economic Conferences were perceived as major developments in the ongoing process towards a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian problem. The initiation of final-status talks had also engendered optimism. We were hoping that, at the close of the century, the region would have achieved a durable peace. Unfortunately, some untoward developments over the last six months have dampened our optimism. The peace process has not only been stalled, but is in serious danger of being reversed.

The unwillingness of the new Israeli Government to honour the peace agreements signed by the previous Government and its decision to rule out any compromise on Jerusalem or a Palestinian State can fatally damage the peace process. Other decisions based on narrow practical considerations can nullify the gains made so far. These include the expansion of Jewish settlements on the occupied lands, efforts to keep the great majority of the West Bank under Israeli control and the decision to open a tunnel next to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Palestinians continue to be subjected to torture and inhumane and degrading treatment. These policies of repression and violence will further reduce the chances of peaceful coexistence.

We must salvage the region from an atmosphere of conflict and war. It is obvious that, if the Middle East were allowed to plunge into a new, vicious cycle of violence and chaos, that would be a serious threat to international peace and security. We should therefore encourage the forces of moderation, dialogue and compromise.

At the core of the Middle East problem, as we all know, is the realization of the right to self-determination of the people of Palestine. In addition, other vital issues, such as the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with the Holy City of Jerusalem as its capital, and the return of approximately three and a half million Palestinian refugees to their homeland in safety and honour, must also be addressed in earnest.

It is incumbent upon the international community to persuade the Israeli Government to implement the agreements arrived at with such difficulty. The United Nations can augment these efforts. It can also take steps to ensure that problems in the region are resolved on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions. We believe that these United Nations resolutions continue to provide a viable and just framework for the realization of the right to self-determination of the people of Palestine.

Peace is the only solution to the problems of the Middle East and should be pursued sincerely and vigorously. The only alternative would be bloodshed and darkness and continued disappointment for a Palestinian people who have suffered so much already.

Mr. Sychou (Belarus) (*interpretation from Russian*): The Republic of Belarus attaches great importance to the solution of the conflict in the Middle East. We have attentively followed the development of the peace process in the region and welcomed the signing in September 1993 of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Agreements by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the subsequent implementation agreements, which testify to the genuine will of both sides to move towards the final goal of lasting peace and stability. Belarus views the conclusion of these agreements as important practical steps on the path towards a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East and expresses the hope that they will contribute to progress in the final stage of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Noting with satisfaction the positive developments that have emerged since the Madrid Conference — the redeployment of Israeli forces from areas of the West Bank, the successful holding on 20 January 1996 of the first Palestinian elections to the Legislative Council and the election of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat as President of the Palestinian Authority — the Republic of Belarus is also deeply concerned by the escalation of tensions in the region resulting from the activities of extremists, continuing acts of violence and the resumption of armed hostilities in territories under the control of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

It is our deep conviction that the vicious circle of violence and confrontation can be broken only around the negotiating table, where both sides should restrain themselves from any actions that could lead to the continuation of violence. The hopes and aspirations that the peoples of the region had begun to cherish since the signing of the Declaration of Principles three years ago should not give way to disappointment and desperation. We believe that, at this critical stage of the region's history, the dynamics of peaceful settlement must be maintained and the unconditional adherence of the parties to the provisions of previously concluded bilateral agreements ensured.

In this connection, the Republic of Belarus stresses the need for the speedy completion of the redeployment

of the Israeli troops in the West Bank, beginning with their withdrawal from Hebron. We note the readiness of the parties for dialogue during current negotiations on the subject at Erez and hope for a successful outcome to those talks.

Unfortunately, the progress achieved in the Middle East settlement in the past five years has been constantly darkened by casualties, particularly among the civilian population, as a result of the activities of terrorist groups aimed at undermining the achievement of the long-awaited dream of peace in this region. The cruel assassination of the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, the series of terrorist acts early this year in Israel conducted by the Islamic extremist group, Hamas, and the explosion at the American facility in Saudi Arabia in June have tragically confirmed the need to step up the all-out battle against terrorism in the Middle East. The Summit of Peacemakers held on 13 March 1996 at Sharm El-Sheikh demonstrated the firm position of the world leaders, who strongly condemned terrorism and expressed their desire to contribute to the attainment of a comprehensive peace and regional stability. We are convinced that the international community must continue to support the efforts of the peacemakers to eliminate terrorism, whatever its motives and by whomever such barbaric acts of violence are committed.

Like other peace-loving nations, Belarus strongly denounces extremism and terrorism in all their manifestations. We understand the need to ensure the security of Israel in the face of internal and external terrorism. However, legitimate security interests should not interfere in the implementation of commitments undertaken with regard to the peaceful settlement of the conflict in the Middle East. We also believe that ensuring security and implementing measures to combat extremism and terrorism are the joint responsibility of both parties to the conflict.

It is perfectly obvious that genuine peace in the Middle East is impossible without significant progress on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks. The resumption of bilateral negotiations between Israel and Syria in late December last year is part of the dynamics of the peace process and must be maintained. We hope that the parties will be able to restart the dialogue as soon as possible on the basis of the principle of the return of land for peace, the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces and the demilitarization of the Syrian Golan.

Belarus learned of the escalation of military hostilities in southern Lebanon in May and April of this year with deep concern. Our delegation calls upon all sides to adhere to the understanding of 26 April 1996, under which calm could be restored on the Lebanese-Israeli border. We consider that agreement to be a serious prerequisite for the resumption of peace negotiations between the parties, which should lead to the full restoration of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon on the basis of Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

It is common knowledge that economic growth and prosperity have a decisive role to play in creating a sound foundation for peace in every part of the world. This is particularly true in the Middle East. That region will continue to be a potential hotbed of tensions if there are no positive improvements in the living conditions of the Palestinians. We are concerned by the significant worsening of the state of the Palestinian economy, in particular as a result of the closure of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the eastern part of Jerusalem that was put into effect in response to the actions of suicidal fanatics in Israel early this year. Belarus expresses the hope that the declared readiness of the Israeli authorities to ease the imposed restrictions and contribute to the strengthening of the economic structure of the Palestinian territories will alleviate the current situation in the very near future.

The praiseworthy efforts of the donor States, the Bretton Woods institutions and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations are also being directed to achieving that goal and we highly commend them.

The intensification of regional economic cooperation is also very important to efforts to establish lasting peace and is a crucial precondition for broadening mutually beneficial bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The third Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit, held last month in the capital of Egypt, was attended by delegations from over 70 countries and 50 international and regional organizations. It was a significant step in the development of economic ties between the Governments of the region and will deepen the dialogue aimed at the cooperative establishment of a stable future in the Middle East.

The recent initiative of Egypt, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Council, supported by the sponsors of the peace process, to establish a bank for economic cooperation and development for the countries of the Middle East and North Africa, including a forum for

regional economic cooperation, is also directed towards this end.

In conclusion, allow me once again to reaffirm the deep commitment of the Republic of Belarus to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict in the Middle East, which should be based on the land-for-peace formula spelled out in the United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and should envisage ensuring the rights of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized borders.

Mr. Zlenko (Ukraine): During the year that has passed since the consideration of this issue at the last session of the United Nations General Assembly, the process of the Middle East settlement has been characterized by ups and downs. An analysis of recent events indicates that, unfortunately, the Middle East peace process begun at Madrid and based on United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) has been hindered and has taken on a dangerous tendency to revert to the gloomy past.

The delegation of Ukraine maintains that the existing situation has been brought about primarily by the parties' deviation from previously undertaken commitments. If the parties continue to take such an approach, the peoples of the region will never reach the temple of agreement and peace. In this regard, Ukraine once again calls upon all parties to the conflict to remain steadily on the road outlined in Madrid in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the Middle East conflict. That will constitute a significant contribution to the strengthening of international peace and security.

We hope that common sense will prevail in the political dialogue between Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Syria and Lebanon and that all the parties will do their best to revitalize the negotiating process and give it a new impetus.

In this connection, as we see it, the important role belongs to the United Nations, whose contribution to the activities of the multilateral working groups on different aspects of the Middle East problem is in many respects the decisive factor.

In its position on the Middle East problem, Ukraine proceeds from the necessity to achieve a mutual compromise between all the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict. We are also convinced that peace in the region can be established only through constructive dialogue on the basis of mutual respect and tolerance.

The results of the recent official visit of the President of Ukraine, Mr. Leonid Kuchma, to the State of Israel, in particular, his talks with the Prime Minister, Mr. Netanyahu — made it clear that our position was accepted with understanding and support. One more indicator of the balanced and consistent policy of Ukraine on the Middle East issue is the outcome of the meeting of the President of Ukraine with the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat, on November 26, 1996, in Bethlehem. The Government of Ukraine plans a number of official visits to the Arab countries of the region — in particular to Lebanon, Syria and Egypt — the practical results of which, we hope, will make an important contribution to accelerating the peace process in the region. Ukraine, being a neutral party, could also be helpful in the achievement of this goal and we are ready to make the necessary efforts at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

In our opinion, one of the most important aspects of the Middle East settlement is the fight against terrorism. The delegation of Ukraine is convinced that the barbarian and forcible methods used by the extremist groups with the aim of undermining peace efforts must be resolutely eradicated. It is inadmissible to let the provocative actions of fanatics slow down the achievement of the long-awaited peace in the Middle East. Our country unconditionally rejects terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. Therefore, we welcome the convening of the Summit of Peacemakers at Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt, which has become the first important step in the fight against the spread of terrorism in the Middle East.

Ukraine was deeply concerned at the military operations in the eastern part of Lebanon that took place in April 1996 and caused casualties both among civilians and United Nations peacekeeping personnel, and prompted a severe humanitarian crisis. In this connection, we consider it appropriate to emphasize once again the need to adhere to the principles of the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of States, as well as to respect the right of each State in the region to a peaceful and safe existence within internationally recognized borders.

At the same time, any actions that gravely threaten the safety and security of United Nations peacekeeping personnel are absolutely unacceptable. The events in the south of Lebanon vividly proved that the elaboration and

adoption at the forty-ninth session of the General Assembly of the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel was a necessary and logical step. Therefore, we would like to take this opportunity once again to urge all States that have not yet done so to consider ratifying, accepting or acceding to the Convention in order to ensure its entry into force at the earliest possible date.

The situation in the region is also destabilized to a great extent by numerous regional conflicts. Ukraine believes that the long-standing territorial disputes between the United Arab Emirates and Iran, Yemen and Eritrea, as well as any similar disputes, should be solved only through peaceful bilateral negotiations or through the International Court of Justice.

We cannot but be concerned at the situation concerning Iraq. In this connection, we consider it necessary once again to emphasize the need to refrain from any further use of force to solve the problems in the region, to strictly adhere to the relevant resolutions on Iraq adopted by the Security Council, and to establish political dialogue between the Government of Iraq and Kurdish groups. In our opinion, any further deterioration in the situation around Iraq is extremely dangerous in the context of the Middle East settlement as a whole and may have unpredictable consequences. We are also concerned at the grave humanitarian crisis that is affecting the Iraqi population and we therefore urge members of the Security Council and the United Nations Secretary-General to make every effort to ensure the early introduction of the mechanism to implement Security Council resolution 986 (1995).

The 50-year history of the Middle East conflict brings to mind the words of the famous Roman historian, Livy, who once said:

> "Certain peace is better and safer than anticipated victory".

The fact that the conflicting parties have already understood this means that we can look to the future with a sense of cautious optimism.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to consult Member States concerning the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund. Representatives may recall that at its third plenary meeting on 20 September 1996, the General Assembly decided that the commemoration would take place on Wednesday, 11 December, in the morning. The United Nations Children's Fund has subsequently requested that it be held in the afternoon instead of the morning. If there is no objection, may I take it that the General Assembly agrees to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund being held in the afternoon on Wednesday, 11 December?

I see no objection.

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.